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ABSTRACT

The self-examination process used by Sinclair Community College (SCC), in Dayton, Ohio, is designed to improve student learning and the processes that contributes to effective and efficient learning. In 1988, SCC created a college-wide Assessment Steering Committee (ASC) charged with reviewing the status of assessment practices at SCC and making recommendations related to assessing student academic achievement. During its second year, the ASC adopted the following three policies which formed the cornerstone of all subsequent assessment initiatives: mandatory assessment and placement of entry level basic skills, mandatory summative assessment of students' skills in their major, and mandatory assessment of students' general education skills. In 1992, a fourth policy guaranteeing career graduates' performance and transfer units was added. Another major phase of the evolution of assessment at SCC was the design of a long-term plan for the assessment of student academic achievement based on the "Plan-Do-Study-Act" Shewhart Cycle. This model has been integrated into a continuous improvement model, which is used to evaluate SCC's major assessment goals. In addition, SCC undertook a mission modeling exercise and focus group sessions to determine the college's structure, systems, staff, skills, style, strategy, and shared values. As a result, the following six core indicators of success were identified: provide students with access to success, promote lifelong learning, enhance student development, sponsor regional cooperation and leadership, provide a quality workplace, and use resources prudently. (MAB)

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101st Annual Meeting
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Monday, March 25, 1996
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"Creating the Link Between Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment"

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CREATING THE LINK BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND ASSESSMENT

Sinclair Community College's process of self-examination has been motivated by one central goal: to improve student learning and the processes contributing to effective and efficient learning. The issue of assessment and student learning is not one which can be studied and settled during the short term, thus on-going discussions and decision making have occurred since the mid 1980's, with strong grass-roots faculty involvement. A college-wide Assessment Steering Committee was formed in 1988, chaired by a full time faculty member, and charged with reviewing the status of assessment practices at Sinclair and making appropriate recommendations related to assessing student academic achievement.

During the first year the Assessment Steering Committee was established (1988), a definition for assessment was formulated and twelve principles of assessment were adopted. These principles guided the development of all subsequent assessment initiatives. The Assessment Steering Committee spent its second year designing three assessment policies that focused on student learning and were subsequently adopted by the Sinclair Board of Trustees. These three policies formed the cornerstone of all subsequent assessment initiatives. The policies clearly defined involvement for students, faculty, and academic departments and required the cooperation of many areas across the campus including Instruction, Student Services, and Institutional Planning & Research. The three policies are: 1. mandatory assessment of degree and certificate seeking students' entry level basic skills in reading, writing and math and subsequent placement; 2. mandatory summative assessment of degree and certificate seeking students' skills in their major; and 3. mandatory assessment of degree and certificate seeking students' general education skills. These three policies led to a fourth policy, adopted in 1992, which "guarantees" career graduates' performance as well as transfer credits.

Another major phase of the evolution of assessment at Sinclair was the design of a long-term plan for the assessment of student academic achievement. A Sinclair Assessment Model was developed and is based on the four-phase Shewhart Cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act) of continuous quality improvement. The PDSA Model provides a mechanism for measuring the extent of implementation of Sinclair's broad-based assessment program and critical success factors and identifies areas needing improvement as well as strengths. The PDSA Model is used to ensure that assessment results are used to make improvements and provided the framework for Sinclair's Institutional Effectiveness Model. The Assessment Steering Committee reviews the PDSA Assessment Model each year to assess the assessment plan.

Sinclair's fifteen year history of assessment initiatives provided a strong foundation for the institution in developing an institutional effectiveness model. Recognizing that the PDSA process is as central to institutional effectiveness as it is to the measurement of student academic achievement, Sinclair began to link its assessment process to the development of a model for institutional effectiveness.

The National Alliance of Community and Technical Colleges (NACTC) defines institutional effectiveness as the process of articulating the mission of the college, setting goals emanating from that mission, defining how the college and the community will know when goals are being met, and using the data from assessment in an ongoing cycle of goal-setting and planning (PDSA). Putting it another way, effectiveness suggests that a college has a discernible mission, is producing outcomes that meet constituency needs, and can conclusively document the outcomes it is producing as a reflection of its mission (AACC Special Report No. 4). NACTC points out that each institution is unique and should devise a system for assessing effectiveness that makes sense to its particular mission and in its own context, using the following three guidelines:

a. The system should be comprehensive in focus and include inquiry into the institution's effectiveness with regard to the acquisition and deployment of human, fiscal, and physical resources, the adequacy of the processes the institution has in place to support goal attainment, and the outcomes the institution achieves.

b. The elements of the system should be derived from the institution's unique mission and goals and the needs of its community.

c. An assessment of student attainment of program outcomes (in both general education and the area of specialization) should be an element of any such system.

Using these guidelines as well as the Assessment (PDSA) Continuous Improvement Model, Sinclair Community College has focused on developing an institutional effectiveness model (see page 6) during the past two years. To that end a number of major goals have either been reached or are currently in progress, including:

- creating a vision which defines what "Sinclair Quality" will be in the future;
- reviewing the environment and determining how to work collaboratively to attain the vision;
- aligning departmental mission models with the overall college mission;
- engaging all campus personnel in examining core indicators of success and defining critical success factors;
- providing training for all college employees in Total Quality Management tools, such as benchmarking, project teams, and measurement as was accomplished through various assessment initiatives.
- initiating pilot projects and a support system to identify and address cross-functional, cross-institutional issues.

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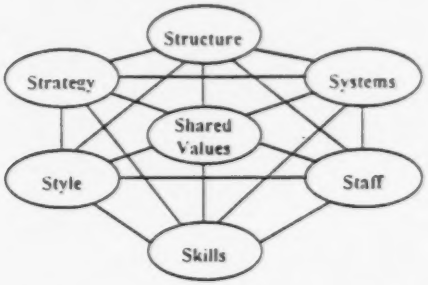
In January of 1993, the President of Sinclair appointed a Sinclair Quality Council, chaired by the Provost and having broad representation from all campus constituencies. The Sinclair Quality Council adopted a unique 7-S model* which was used to learn more about Sinclair prior to the development of a vision statement. As a result of the 7-S process, the Sinclair Quality Council developed and drafted a Vision Statement for the College. Focus group sessions were conducted providing the opportunity for input from all college employees. The Sinclair Board of Trustees adopted the Vision Statement in March of 1994.

Figure 1. The 7-S Model



Components of the 7-S Model (see Figure 2) also played an important role in the collegewide effort to develop mission models for divisions and departments, which began in the summer of 1994. A mission model is a facilitation-based tool that allows the staff of a department, to portray, in a single image, the relationship of individual activities/tasks carried out in the department to the central mission of the college. For Sinclair "learning" is the central mission; therefore, regardless of the department, learning is the focus of each college operation.

* "Structure Is Not Organization," by Robert H. Waterman, Jr., Thomas J. Peters, and Julien R. Phillips; Business Horizons, June, 1980, pp. 14-26.

Figure 2. The 7-S Model

Structure Is NOT Organization...The 7-S Model

Productive organization change is not simply a matter of structure, although structure is important. It is not so simple as the interaction between strategy and structure, although strategy is critical too. Effective organization change is really the relationship between structure, strategy, systems, style, skills, and staff, and something called shared values.

Structure: Structure refers to what the organization "looks" like with respect to executing the strategy.

Strategy: Strategy consists of those actions that an organization plans and executes in response to realizing or anticipating changes in the external environment-its customers, its competitors.

Systems: Systems are the procedures, formal and informal, that make the organization go, day by day, year by year, or, in other words, how work gets done.

Style: An organization's style is a reflection of its culture(s) and a vehicle through which philosophy is realized.

Staff: Staff describes the process through which the College recruits, hires, trains, and develops its employees.

Skills: Skills are the dominating attributes, or capabilities, within an organization.

Shared Values: Shared values are the guiding concepts-a set of values and aspirations, often unwritten, that go beyond the conventional formal statement of Sinclair's objectives.

As a result of the mission modeling experience, core indicators of success were developed. Input included information derived from focus group sessions with reviews by department and division personnel of their mission models to determine how success would be measured. Six core indicators and definitions were identified and align closely with Sinclair's mission. They are:

Access to Success. Sinclair assists its students to achieve their educational goals through overcoming barriers that preclude or limit participation in meaningful learning opportunities.

Lifelong Learning. Sinclair provides learning opportunities which promote personal and professional growth throughout a lifetime.

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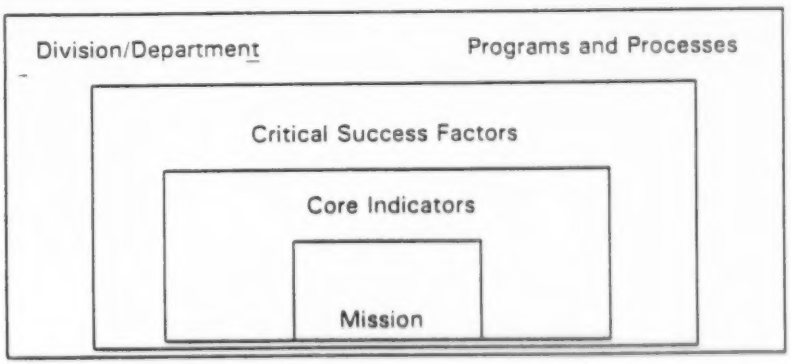
Student Development. Sinclair enhances the learning process through services and programs intended to support the development of the whole person.

Community Focus. Sinclair is a catalyst for regional cooperation and leadership, which improves the quality of life in the Miami Valley.

Quality Workplace. Sinclair nurtures and supports a workforce and an organizational structure dedicated to the continuous improvement of the opportunities the college provides for its students.

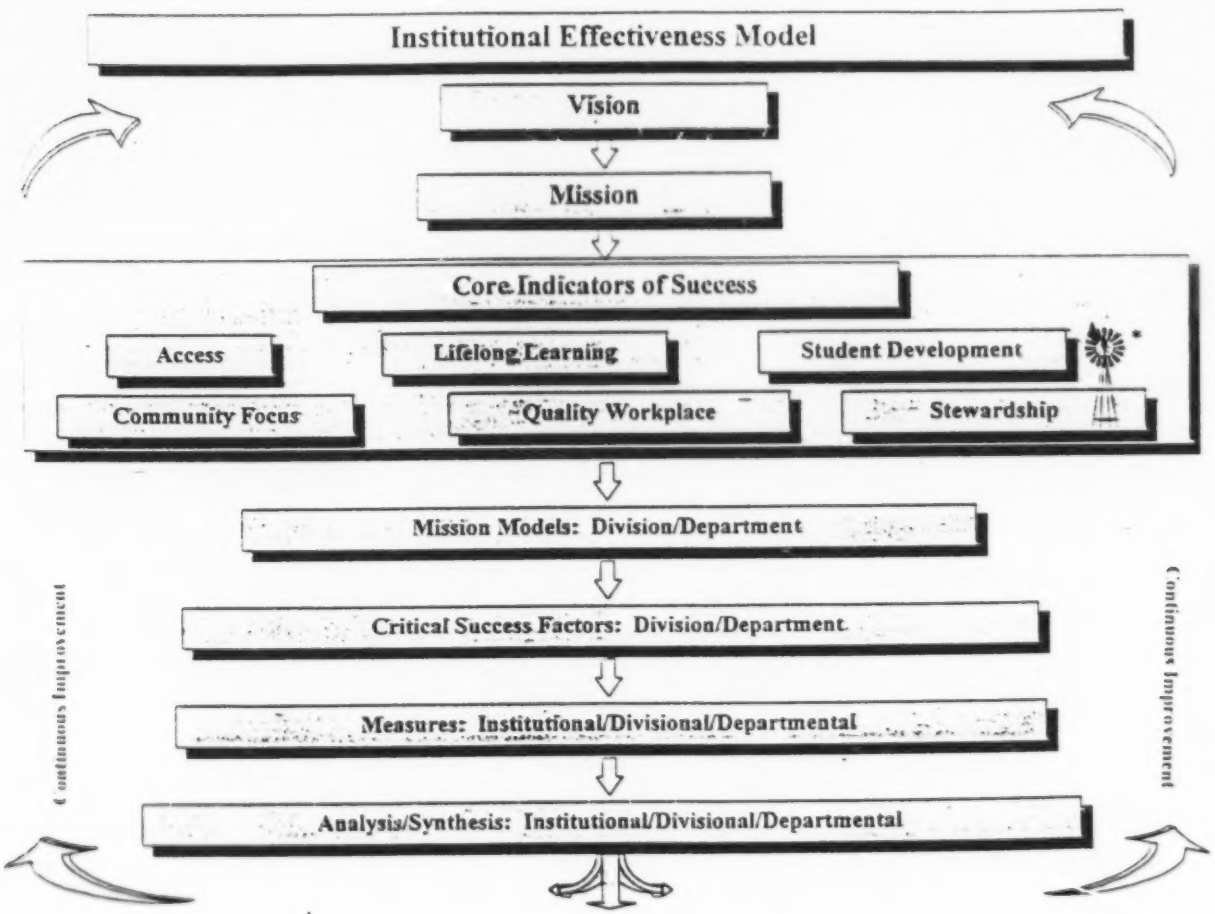
Stewardship. Institutional effectiveness at Sinclair is ensured by a commitment to the prudent use of resources through continuous improvement in efficiency and effectiveness in all aspects of the college's operations.

Figure 3. This diagram illustrates Sinclair's process of aligning the College's Mission Statement with Core Indicators of Success, which subsequently led to identification of Critical Success Factors. The result will be division/department measures of performance regarding Critical Success Factors, thus providing a substantiated rationale for instituting meaningful, quantifiable change.



Under development are Critical Success Factors (CSF's) which are actions and/or outcomes at the college, division, and department level that represent how the Mission is accomplished through each of the Core Indicators. For example, student academic achievement is one of the Critical Success Factors of the Core Indicator, Stewardship. The goal is for CSF's to be measurable and to represent ways of assessing the extent to which each unit (college, division, department) is supporting each Core Indicator. A meaningful Critical Success Factor is one that is absolutely essential to the accomplishment of the unit's own Mission Model, practical to measure/document, and provides information useful for continuous improvement of the unit's performance. However, CSF's may vary for each Core Indicator, and actual CSF's are likely to vary with each unit at each operational level.

This session will focus on the process used by Sinclair Community College in creating the link between assessment and institutional effectiveness through defining it's vision and mission, identifying core indicators of success, and developing mission models for the various Divisions of the College.



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- PDSA Assessment Model (Student Academic Achievement)